

# Sage Grouse Initiative

Conservation Beyond Boundaries SGI



## Overview

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) launched the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) in 2010 to achieve wildlife conservation through sustainable ranching. NRCS leads this proactive partnership of ranchers, agencies, universities, conservation groups, and businesses in 11 Western states. Ranchers play a pivotal role by voluntarily enrolling their lands in SGI to improve sage grouse habitat and conserve intact sagebrush lands. SGI applies a highly targeted and science-based approach that works through cooperation, incentives and community support.

The greater sage-grouse once numbered in the millions before settlement and today has dwindled to about 200,000. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) will determine whether to list the species under the Endangered Species Act in 2015. A decision to list the bird could have far-reaching effects on ranching, as well as business industries such as energy production.

## Funding Sources

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

## Results

From 2010 to 2014, NRCS invested \$296.5 million, while partners and landowners have provided an additional \$128 million, bringing the total SGI investment to

\$424.5 million. Agricultural producers on nearly 1,000 ranches have carried out combinations of conservation practices on 4.4 million acres across 11 Western states.

Major SGI achievements in fiscal year 2014:

- Conserved large and intact ranches, reducing the overarching threat of fragmentation from subdivisions. Conservation easements on 20,215 acres work in tandem with state and federal policy to increase benefits to birds. For example, conservation easements in Wyoming that are within the state's core areas are expected to reduce by two thirds anticipated bird losses from development.
- Improved grazing systems, adding nesting and hiding cover that is predicted to increase sage grouse numbers by 8 to 10 percent within the 297,026 acres of new grazing systems.
- Removed 101,344 acres of invasive juniper and/or pinyon trees in core habitats, restoring historic sagebrush-steppe for sage grouse and preventing the loss of 60 percent of the available forage for wildlife and livestock.
- Marked or moved high-risk fences to prevent sage grouse collisions. The 35 miles of fence marked or moved prevent 156 sage grouse collisions annually and reduce the fence risk strike by 83 percent.

*Sage grouse have dwindled to 200,000, and if they are listed as an endangered species, the effects on ranching and other industries will be far reaching.*



## Feature Story

## Win-Win for Sage Grouse and Cattle

The Tanner family runs Angus cattle and operates a summer guest ranch in the heart of prime sage grouse habitat, located in Northwest Utah's Box Elder County. They have participated in the Sage Grouse Initiative since its inception in 2010.

"I've been thrilled, just very pleased with the response," Jay Tanner says. "It's almost unbelievable how the native species are coming back." Jay and his brothers, Blaine and Brent, carry on the legacy of their forefathers that homesteaded here in the 1870s. The Della Ranches rely on a mix of private and leased public lands for their livelihood. In 2011, they earned a regional Environmental Stewardship Award from the National Cattlemen's Foundation.

Improvements for sage grouse include the removal of 9,000 acres of invasive junipers, tweaking grazing management to make room for nesting sage grouse, and installing water developments for cattle and wildlife.

Juniper treatments help open up more grazing areas on Tanner's private land that lie above meadows that sage grouse use when raising their young in the spring and early summer.

"Some of my property is really prime nesting habitat and brood-rearing habitat for sage grouse," Tanner says. "It's nice to have new feed in the juniper control areas. My cattle can use that until later in the summer when the sage grouse broods have moved on. It's OK to give them room."

Juniper removal projects also have allowed some historic springs to produce water, springs that were dried up for years. "The springs are producing

much better," he says. "If we get out of this drought pattern we've been in, I'm expecting to see the springs do much better."

Plus, through running the guest ranch, the Tanner family teaches visitors about ranching and wildlife conservation at the ground level. After staying at the ranch for a week, people gain a new perspective about land stewardship. "We share a little piece of heaven with those who come here," says Jay's wife Diane Tanner.



Rancher Jay Tanner

Fiscal Year 2014 Sage Grouse Initiative  
NRCS Financial Assistance (FA) and Active and Completed Contracts\* and Partner Investments

	Restoration and Enhancement					Conservation Easements				
	Contracts	NRCS Investment (EQIP)	Partner Investment	Total Investment	Acres	Contracts	NRCS Investment (ACEP)	Partner Investment	Total Investment	Acres
California	11	\$1,917,054	\$639,018	\$2,556,072	13,583	1	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$6,000,000	2,400
Colorado	9	\$611,877	\$203,959	\$8,836	50,831		\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Idaho	22	\$1,967,689	\$655,896	\$2,623,585	21,060	2	\$2,560,763	\$2,560,763	\$5,121,526	3,839
Montana	5	\$1,473,078	\$491,026	\$1,964,104	53,686		\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Nevada	9	\$656,886	\$218,962	\$875,848	48,499	3	\$2,056,750	\$2,056,750	\$4,113,500	4,664
N. Dakota	7	\$182,773	\$60,924	\$243,697	9,277		\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Oregon	41	\$4,649,511	\$1,549,837	\$6,199,348	56,496		\$0	\$0	\$0	0
S. Dakota	3	\$871,593	\$290,531	\$1,162,124	41,669		\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Utah	34	\$4,308,895	\$1,436,298	\$5,745,193	92,922	5	\$3,729,750	\$3,729,750	\$7,459,500	9,312
Washington	11	\$722,869	\$240,956	\$963,825	11,626		\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Wyoming	13	\$2,034,497	\$678,166	\$2,712,663	171,278		\$0	\$0	\$0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>19,396,722</b>	<b>6,465,574</b>	<b>25,862,296</b>	<b>570,926</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>\$11,347,263</b>	<b>\$11,347,263</b>	<b>\$22,694,526</b>	<b>20,215</b>

Data source: NRCS Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division, January 2015.